

7 February 1957

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Effects of Soviet R_epression in Hungary on Communist Parties in Italy and France

1. There has been a rather widespread impression that the Communist parties of France and Italy have been seriously affected by the Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising. Undoubtedly this action created serious strains within these parties. Nevertheless, it does not appear that they have been permanently damaged or that we should anticipate a major decline in their hold on their respective electorates.

2. The following considerations suggest that the future of these parties should not be too optimistically projected from our viewpoint.

A. General

1. It should never be forgotten that the Communist operational code dictates maximum effort to recover from adverse developments by vigorous resumption of tactical initiatives along proven and established lines. Both parties have already undertaken the counter-offensive, and there is every reason to believe that they will have some success in exploiting a variety of domestic issues.

2. The long range impact of the Hungarian events may be somewhat discounted in view of the short memory of the average voter and of the fact that external events, no matter how dramatic, have relatively little influence on the way the ordinary French or Italian working man casts his vote.

3. In any case, the efforts which the Soviet Union is making to stabilize the position of World Communism will probably result in some measure of external detente which will at least partially reduce the ferment created by the events of October and November. This is not to say that the impact of these events is ephemeral; it constitutes a lesion in the body of International Communism.

4. The impact on intellectuals has been serious, and some have permanently fallen out of rank. Nevertheless, the majority will probably rationalize their continued allegiance, either positively, like the French poet Vercors, who reaffirms his loyalty to the ideal of Soviet Communism in spite of its past mistakes, or negatively, for lack of an attractive alternative.

5. The underlying roots of the Communist protest vote which are largely social and economic have not been affected by these external events and can be destroyed only by a much deeper and more prolonged process within the two countries - the process of reform and progress.

6. It seems unlikely that the campaign against Euratom and the common market which is being conducted throughout the Communist press of all European countries will succeed in halting their development. If, however, the common market and Euratom should either fail of achievement or prove visibly disappointing, the advantages to Communism will be great.

7. Dissident Communism, whether of the Reale or the Hervé type, does not appear to have political viability. It seems likely that current movements will be subject to the virtually universal law that Communist dissidence is doomed at best to protracted isolation and at worst to early death.

B. Specific Developments in Italy

1. Although Togliatti's authority was challenged at the 8th Party Congress, it may have emerged strengthened rather than weakened. This is difficult to determine at this stage, but it should be noted that the Central Committee and the directing bodies of the PCI have on the whole been invigorated by the addition of new blood and the removal or elimination of dissident elements.

2. The PCI has effectively seized upon certain domestic political issues, notably the debate on the Agrarian Pact Law. It is not certain that it will be able to carry such campaigns to a successful conclusion, but their disruptive impact on Italian political stability should not be minimized.

3. The setback to the PCI in the labor union field is serious, although not reflected in corresponding gains by the free trade unions. The CGIL, under Communist domination, may represent a major trump card in frustrating the merger of the PSI and PSDI and may continue to be a stumbling block to the establishment of a viable non-Communist working class movement.

4. Despite certain losses (estimated at perhaps 2%) the Communist hold on the cooperatives, which is a basic source of funds, is unshaken.

5. It has been held that PCI strength has fallen drastically, and there have been a considerable number of group defections and a general lag in renewal of Party membership. Nevertheless, even non-Communist Italian newspapers speculate that by the end of its membership drive the Party will claim, if not actually achieve, approximately the same membership as in 1956. Moreover, it may be suspected that the PCI might have a tactical reason for keeping its membership figures relatively low at this stage.

C. France

1. It is generally agreed that the apparatus of the PCF has stood firm under the Thorez leadership. Its strength and organizational stability have not been diminished by the Hungarian events. Furthermore, it is possible that a certain tendency toward atrophy, which has been noted in recent years and which has been the result of the enervation of prolonged and isolated opposition, may be in part overcome by the shock of the Hungarian events, leading to increased militancy and discipline.

2. As noted above, the impact on the intellectuals has probably run its course and may in fact now be producing a reverse reaction further strengthening their dedication. Even the spectacular revolt of Sartre should not be regarded as irreversible.

3. It is generally noted that economic setbacks resulting from the Suez crisis constitute a promising political issue for PCF exploitation. If other factors lead to a slowing down in the rate of economic progress of the past few years, or even to a recession, the Communists will have abundant material for propaganda and political agitation.

4. Unlike the situation in Italy, Communism in France is not confronted with a major crisis arising out of the prospective emergence of a large non-Communist socialist party. In Italy the successful merger of the two Socialist parties would undoubtedly cost the PCI considerable membership and voting strength. There is no corresponding possibility visible in France at this time.

5. The recent by-election in Paris, while it was a marked triumph for the Rightist candidate, did not indicate any clear loss of voting strength by the Communists, and has even been speciously interpreted in their own press as a sort of success.

6. The probability that developments in Africa, especially Algeria, will prove adverse, if not disastrous, suggests that French politics may soon face a period of intense exacerbation. Both right and left extremism would be heightened and the prospect for disruptive Communist agitation would be increased.

7. Efforts are being made by responsible groups in France to remedy defects of the political system, notably in the electoral laws and in the relation of the executive to the legislative branch. The Communists will vigorously oppose these efforts, and may have considerable success in frustrating moves to create a more stable polity. This in turn would encourage Right extremism and might lead to an attempted coup or at least to greater political tension and violence.

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